

## ***THE GAME***

The Buddha, the body and the chest of drawers are the protagonists of Ravi Kashi's recent works, assembled to form 'The Game'. Each of these serves the artist as a screen for the self's disquietudes: a figure of contestation between carnality and transcendence, between archived sensations and unsettling revelations. Kashi presents two suites of photographs, 'Engaging Buddha' and 'Meeting in Darkness', and a timed video sequence, 'Chest of Secrets', in which he gradually discloses the pattern of secret obsessions lying beneath the surface routines of normality.

In 'Engaging Buddha', Kashi unpacks a series of contraries that are usually fused under pressure into the figure of the spiritual questor. Through objects arranged in variable tableaux around a Buddha head, he extracts and performs the tensions between time and eternity, the detached sage and the passionate martyr, the ladder to heaven and the feast of sensuous pleasure, the self as animal nature and the self blindfolded against the world's blandishments. 'Meeting in Darkness' transits from spirit to body. Through a dramatic choice of lighting, Kashi refers to the realms of fashion and film noir here, floating his narrative around a pair of torsos, male and female, cast as though from sculptures dating back to classical antiquity. These bodies conduct a muted dialogue of temptation and thwarted communion, trapped in wires, exhibited like scientific specimens or commodities in glass jars.

Structured by allusion to the glissando succession of images in a slide-show, 'Chest of Secrets' is a memoir phrased as a detective search carried out in the inmost recesses of the mind. The artist guides us, without comment, through drawers that open to reveal sprouts and spikes, feathers and ripped gauze, a toy tiger and a gun wrapped in newspaper, green glass marbles and stuffed devil's tails, torn paper and children's alphabet blocks. Kashi conveys us to that deep substratum of consciousness where the roots of play and war, lust and affection, quest and death mingle.

'The Game' originates in the artist's delight in arranging objects to provoke spontaneous auguries. This procedure bears an affinity with the surrealist game of 'The Exquisite Corpse', in which collage-poems were developed through a sequence of unpredictable contributions by various hands. At once lyrical and sinister, 'The Game' speaks of the astute gambits of spy-craft and of suits that fall into place by chance, of capricious dice that can change the fortunes of princes as in the Mahabharata, and of that greatest of games, the *leela* of the gods, from which, as Indic myth suggests, the world was born. At its core, 'The Game' articulates the gamble that is self-recognition: What is to be done with the hidden others one finds within oneself?

**Ranjit Hoskote**

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### ***Artist Note About The Show:***

***"For nothing is only ever one thing" – Virginia Woolf***

For years, I have been collecting objects that seemed interesting, but without any design. However, one day when I started placing them one next to the other, magic happened. Unexpected meanings started emerging from the juxtaposition. This naturally led to a process of exploration and expansion of the association of meanings. I began photographing the various arrangements. Eventually, what started as a playful experiment became a serious project and its scope got expanded and gained immense depth.

Behind this exercise, the concept of *Sannidhi* was constantly in the mind. (Sannidhi is a concept found in traditional Indian aesthetic discourse. It roughly translates as 'Proximity / Close-by / in the presence of'). Along the way, I realized that my project and the concept had become irrevocably intertwined: I had begun to interpret it in visual terms, exploring how new meanings are generated when two or more objects come into proximity.

But it is not to say there was no pattern to the whole thing: the arrangements were planned to some extent but as the shooting proceeded, fresh ideas emerged, new associations popped up. This entire process can also probably be called '**Photo-performance**' in the sense that it is a photo documentation of continuously changing installations happening in the studio space. Here conventional / given meaning or primary meaning of the objects are unfixed, transformed, extended and distorted. More suggestive and evocative interpretations become possible because of the new associations. Personally, for me, this journey of surprises seems never ending.